

THE TRYST

By Alice Brown

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. WALTER TAYLOR



HAT a man nearing forty is far from being in his right mind when he even contemplates an excursion with two recently married couples, one of the brides being she whom he has not been able to cease loving with an ardor intensified by the certainty that he had been denied his chance with her by circumstance only, bare circumstance, a matter of staying in a place eight and three-quarters days instead of nine, thereby missing her by a train—this is pathologically evident. I was the man. I was at Naples, with no more idea that Julia and her young husband were there for an ecstatic minute of their bridal tour than I had that I should be dining with them in a kind of enraged content, being offered fruit from her soft finger-tips I would have died to kiss—I let myself go now in the telling of it as I let myself go mentally at that incredible dinner, since, after all, there has to be a moment's delirium even for a man of forty who has got his wound. I had met them face to face in the street, I absurdly chaffering for corals I didn't want, only to spur the vendor's verbal acrobatics, and then meaning to go on to the Aquarium and pretend I had an interest in fins and octopi, when they came on me, the radiant four of them, she and her Jack, Billy Petersham and his new wife, who had been a widow, over-corseted and creaking. She always, in spite of decency, made you think of her stays, and I never saw her without a vague nautical memory that stays are something a boat is warped into or warped out of, and I never could resist the certainty that she had got in and stayed warped. They greeted me, three of them, with the hilarious ecstasy of the inordinately joyous crowded up one more notch of bliss by the spectacle of the enforcedly abstemious for whom the cupboard is bare of

“syrops tinct with cinnamon”

and the heavenly manna of verified illusion.

“Dine with us, old boy,” Jack said at once, and mentioned the gilded hotel on the

height where I had been too tame-spirited to go.

I looked at him a second before I answered, looked him up and down perhaps, for I had a chance to think how fresh-colored his face was, how hued by blood so good and so new that it might have run from heavenly founts, how white his teeth were, and how his honest eyes met me with their old clarity and kindness, but more—a challenge, perhaps, to note how happy he was, and what a conqueror. I noted his exquisite clothes, too, his lilac tie—I knew the stockings matched it, if only the eye could have got at them—his general look of something flowered out in the spring. He was a splendor, no mistake. I must have hesitated, for before I answered, Julia was holding out her hand, that slender hand I knew in all its gloved seclusion, in its slim, lovely length as it fed her beautiful lips—she held it out to me, and I took it and forgot Jack's question and his tie. I only stood and stared into that face I had so hungered for—and yet I had seen it night upon night, framed in the black wall of darkness, or against the moving tapestry of my shut eyes—I had been seeing it, I thought, “every day i' the hour” since she had been reft away by her Jack; but only God He knew how horribly I had been longing to set eyes once more upon its fair reality. She was above all women beautiful, not because I loved her, but chiefly that she was so kind. The faint flush, the fineness of her cheek, the glory of hair all gold and rarer, the wistful look of her blue eyes: these a lover, if he had been also a poet, might inadequately have sung. But nobody in this generation, nobody but a dead and gone cavalier who clapped his sword in scabbard to write a lyric explaining why swords must be out and love-knots temporarily put by, only he could have hit off that human look of hers, of sympathy, of compassion, of knowing exactly how the under dog felt, with even a surprising hint of having been herself, at some time, desperately at odds with fortune and now remembering it. This was not for me, I thought.

as I stood stupidly worshipping her. Julia Dove never had, I was sure, the least suspicion of my love for her. How could she, when she was engaged the day I met her, and I must have looked to her a dry old *hortus siccus* of emotions as I was, pelting round after historical data, even more desiccated than was entirely just, seen through the lilac mists of Jack's ties and hose and his beaming glance. But now her look seemed to say inexplicably—"Dear man, be comforted. You are shockingly lonesome. So am I——"

There I pulled myself up in my unlawful imaginings. She couldn't be. The candid glance meant only so she once had been before she found him and twinned her soul with his. But all she really said, independently of her kind eyes, was this, oh, in the dearest voice,—

"Do, Mr. Olmstead. Do come." I dropped her hand.

"Thank you," said I, with the abruptness of one recalled. "I will."

So we five dined together in the splendor of the Bertolini, and sat on the terrace afterward like funny, modern gods on Olympus; and watched the lights flaming out and twinkling out below, and heard faint touches of music, and knew the multitudinous life of the city was dancing itself blind and mad; and doing the little tasks that bought its bread, and playing its pageant because its blood ran so fast it couldn't help it, and yet thrifitly, since the foreigners paid for piping. Mrs. Billy and I did most of the talking. I fancied she was rather glad of a prosaic new element, she who was almost forty herself, and getting painfully attached to succulent dishes and talk about reducing one's self and, on this occasion, my immunity from care because nature turned me out so lean. Her husband smoked and stared at her through the dusk, glorifying her into the eternal beautiful, I have no doubt, because she was new and his; and Julia looked at the city and said nothing. It was my one hour, not to shine, not to acquire, not to do in any sense a memorable deed, but to sit in the same visible universe with Julia Dove. Once I got a little drunk with it, the wonder of it, the ineffable compassion of the upper powers to allow me this heavenly anodyne before my heart beat itself out with lonesome misery, and I found myself repeating idiotically:

"Only to kiss the air——" There I stopped, and got hold of myself for a fool; but Mrs. Billy clacked in with her complacent note, perfectly ready for all challenges of give or take:

"What's that, Mr. Olmstead? Is it a new song?"

"Not absolutely new," said I stupidly, "though it's for all time. It's been running in my head. I've been trying to get the last line."

"Why, I know it," said Julia, with no hesitation in her clear young voice:

"Only to kiss that air
That lately kissed thee."

I know it all."

And then, as if the immortals loved me, and meant to accord me one more blissful cup to live on till I died of surfeit and despair, she sat here with the lights of Naples below her in a seemly humbleness and the stars shining like her own galaxy, and repeated it all.

"Shall I write it down for you?" she asked, at the end.

"No," said I. "I shall remember." I got on my feet. I'd had all I could carry.

"Good-night," I said. Then I was wishing them joy all round—joy and a fortunate trip, in a manner that, I hope, satisfied the lightly conventional; but Jack, for some reason, would not hear of losing me.

"Breakfast with us," he said. I have had an idea since that because I was staying at a meagre *pension* below he had confirmed his estimate of my poverty. "Then come on to Pompeii."

I didn't want Pompeii, or any further spectacle of marital felicity. I remembered the gentle eternal sunlit gloom of the dead city, as I had seen it before, and it appeared to me that, superadded to my own grounded sense that life itself was pretty well over, I should as soon choose an after-dinner stroll in the catacombs.

"Awfully good of you," I said, "but I'm due at Capri. I'm afraid I shall have to be leaving rather early in the morning to make it."

I was due there because I had to have a pretext, and that would serve as well as any.

"Who's at Capri?" inquired Mrs. Billy skittishly, and I tried dismally to look as

if somebody very fetching indeed might be there; whereupon she forgot she was mated and settled again, and bridled in the old way. "Well, we'll let you off from Pompeii," she conceded, "but you simply must meet us at Pæstum."

Immediately, not because she said it, for what she said meant to me, as it did to every man save Billy, less than the crackling of thorns under a pot—for I suppose a sufficient crackling might boil the dinner, and Billy is the raw material that boils easily—but for some reason hidden even from that inner self which is forever hearing unexpected calls and challenges, immediately I felt mad to go to Pæstum.

"Yes," said Jack, from his perennial desire to challenge everybody to "come on" whither he is going, "yes, come on to Pæstum. That'll be Thursday. We make it from La Cava."

I knew Cava of the Tyrrhenians, all blue mountain and silent valley and hills and hollow distances, and balconies moonlighted. And now it was full moon, and my merciless fancy pictured me Julia in the sea of it, and Jack—commonplace Jack, yet he was young!—he adoring her. I would have none of Cava. But Pæstum was still drawing me; it had me with an iron grip.

"We're doomed to Pæstum because Julia wants it," said Jack fondly, with the husband's young pride of being under dominion. "Think it over, Jule. It's as full of malaria as it can stick. Come on to Capri with Olmstead, and I'll give you a black pearl."

"I'm sorry," said Julia, in her dear voice pierced with a thrill of something I had never heard in it—resistance, maybe, not of him but for the sake of what she was obliged to do. "I have to go there."

"Have to, child? Why have you?"

I looked at her and wondered why: not from wilfulness, for that wasn't in her, but for some reason so rigid that not only could she not permit it to be withstood, but she herself, from its unknown power, could not withstand it. Now the fair territory of her face was unfeignedly perplexed.

"I don't know," she owned. "I have to go, that's all. I know I have to."

"Gammon," said Jack, still fondly. If it had been less than a lover's acquiescent pride I couldn't have suffered him. "What if we let you go alone?"

"I should have to, then," she said, in the same serious wistfulness of wonder. "I can't bear to be so obstinate; but truly I've got to go."

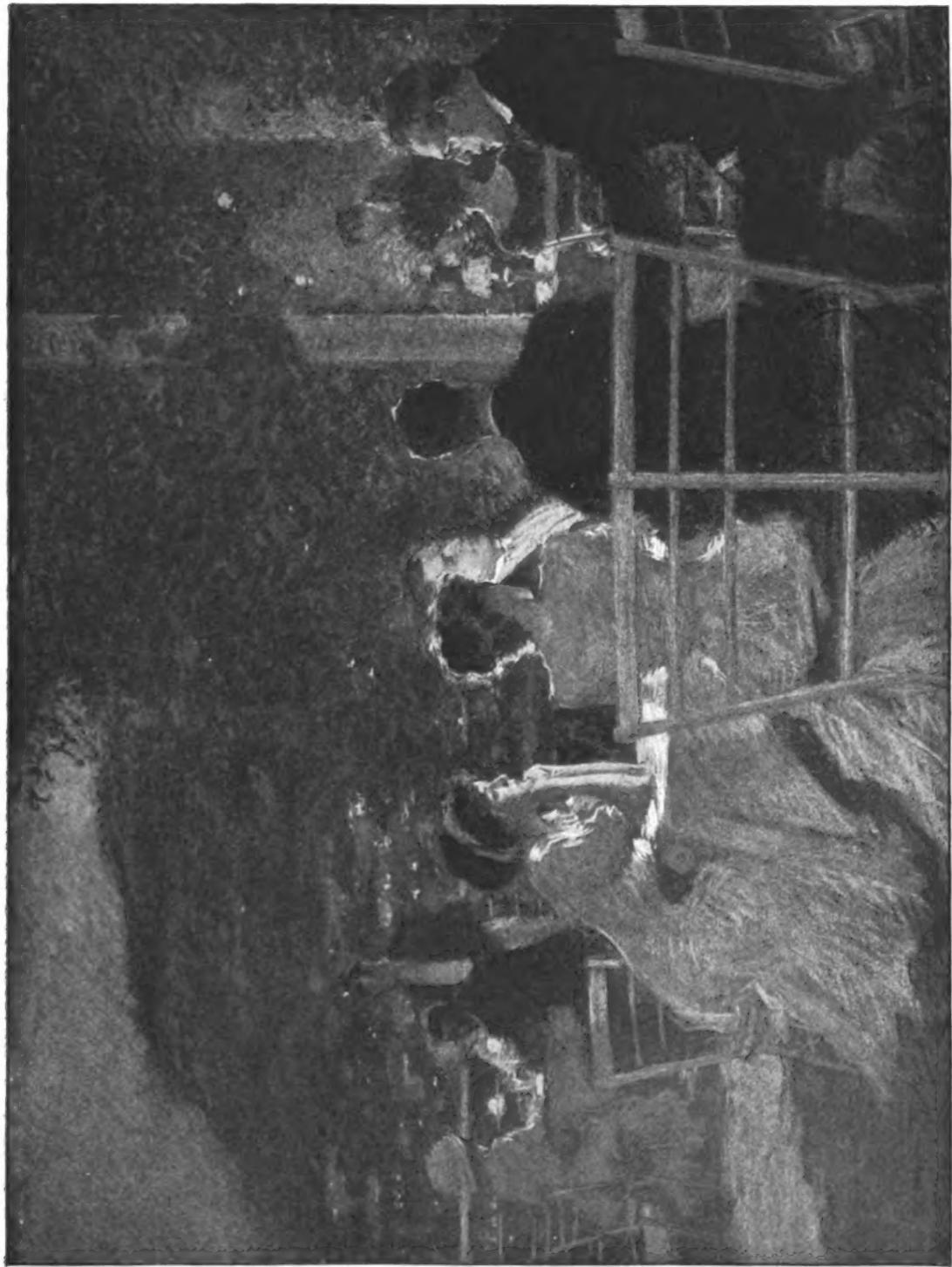
Jack laughed. He liked her sudden tyranny, and took her hand and swung it back and forth.

"All right, then," said he, "we've got to go. Olmstead, how about you? Can't you reconsider?"

"Assuredly," I said, with no volition, it seemed to me afterward, to say that particular thing. "I've got to go, too. I'll meet you there."

So we looked out times and trains and made our final pact. I had privately decided that, for all my mythical engagement at Capri, I should probably stay on at Naples up to the point of being due at Pæstum—for due there I was, I solemnly knew, for other reason than that I had vowed to meet the lately married there. But what the reason was, I could no more say than Julia could, of hers. Only there was a reason.

The few days passed, and I occupied them as well as I could for thinking of the moon at Cava, in running back over my own life, meagre though it was of incident, to see, once for all, whether I could have made it different. I didn't find that I could. At every point where other men score, in the brave crisis, the big distances, I had slipped a cog. When a man was needed at the vital spot, I simply couldn't be there. When life demanded testimony of me, I might have it to offer, but court was never sitting that day. The whole thing was consistent. It had happened to me over and over. It wasn't that I was faint-hearted and weak-backed, or that my legs were not strong enough to make a pace. I was becalmed in some zone of the soul. Information never reached me. Boats couldn't get into my latitude with the news of the battles that were going to be, or the great treaties that would prevent my striking futile blows for a quarrel that was lost. It had all been like a retribution for some misdeed of mine. I felt that strongly, for I believed in the justice that dogs us like a loving hound, and I knew it was part of the beneficent scheme of things that if we are hit over the head, it is that we have at some time bought the blow. Only, how had I deserved precisely this? Why was I "come-



Drawn by F. Walter Taylor.

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tardy-of" in all the games of life? How had it been managed that I shouldn't find Julia three months before the fresh-colored Jack brought his conquering cravats into the field? I hadn't even had a chance—and why? I felt it would help me for the home stretch, which had, after all, to be run with ardor, even if to a decreed ignominy, to know.

The morning came, and all fell out as we had said. We met at Pæstum station, the five of us, they with little canvas bags of luncheon from the paternal Hotel de Londres, an extra portion for me. There was not a single tourist besides ourselves—"a single, blooming tourist," Billy said—and the sky was Italian blue, and a light wind moving to welcome us, when between dry fields where wild larkspur bloomed we walked toward the temple—and I, by what seemed some fated chance, walked with Julia, while Jack leaped the low walls to bring her larkspur and crowd it into her hands. She was silent, and I seemed to know it was because the moment, the day, meant something to her nobody could share—nobody but me, perhaps, for I, too, knew it meant tremendously. And then we were in face of the great yellow-pillared splendor, and we dared to enter and wander up and down its ruined aisles. The gods were there, I knew perfectly well, and said so; but I chanced to say it was Apollo, for I heard him, and Mrs. Billy kept chirping:

"But why do you say Apollo, Mr. Olmstead, when this is the Temple of Neptune? Don't you know it's the Temple of Neptune, Mr. Olmstead? Isn't it Neptune you mean?"

And then I got meek and patient because there was no other way of hushing her, and said, "Yes, I did mean Neptune." But about this time we all began to notice Julia. She had stayed apart from us, in our wandering up and down, our profane feet where priests had ministered, and now she was hurrying back and forth, peering out between columns, even so far as the line of distant saline blue, and her face had piteously changed. It was gray-pale and her eyes were black and anguished. Her husband saw it about as soon as I did, and started for her over grassy gulfs between the slabs. But when he would have touched her, she waved him off. She almost pushed him.

"What is it, darling?" I heard him say, and she looked so unfriended that I was glad the tender word was ready for her. "Lost something?"

She started and looked at him, not, I could have sworn, knowing him at all, and then put both her hands to her head in an unaffected gesture of wild perplexity.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know." And then, "Where is the ship?"

He took her by the arm, and led her along perforce, and made her sit.

"She feels the heat," I heard him say to Mrs. Billy who was staring. "Get the apollinaris, Bill. Wet a handkerchief in it, somebody."

But there was really no heat to feel. The little breeze was still doing its kindest for us. Julia laughed out now. Her color had come back as if, having gone to another part of the temple, she had escaped an especial territory of influence.

"What are you giving me apollinaris for?" she asked. "Jack, you're dripping that handkerchief over Mrs. Billy's dress. Want it on my head? Of course I don't want a great wet dab on my head! Come, let's read the guide-book and then have luncheon."

So we avoided looking at one another, the rest of us, and went rather hastily into activities, as if we had witnessed some special madness that had blessedly passed, and must never be thought of any more. And in due time we had our luncheon, and fed the lean dogs that came, evidently by habit, to yearn for bits, and then it was in the air that the Temple of Ceres must be visited, and everybody, well primed by Jack's conscientious perorations from the guide-book, rose to go. All but me, and, for a moment, all but Julia.

"Come, come," said Jack to her. It was impatient, but the impatience of a solicitude most tender. "Get a move on, missus. The day's 'most over."

She shook her head. The puzzled look had come back to her.

"I don't believe I can," she said, and she spoke with some difficulty, as they do who have imperfectly rehearsed their subject-matter. "I might be late."

He gave her arm a little shake.

"Come, come, dear," said he. "You're not going to worry me again?"

That seemed to bring her back with a wrench to what we are pleased to call rea-



Drawn by F. Walter Taylor.

Both hands out, she rushed to me, and I with my two hands received her.—Page 725.

sonableness, and she laughed and turned with him obediently enough. They were midway out of the temple, all of them, when they remembered me.

"Come along, Olmstead," Jack threw back at me. He was entirely good-natured now he had his own special prize under convoy. "You mustn't keep Ceres waiting. They don't like it."

"I'm not going," I said. "I'll take a nap. See you at the train."

At that, Julia, his wife, stopped short and gave me that puzzled but now almost recognizing look; but he reminded her by a touch on the arm, and she went on with him, patient, I could see, and droopingly. And Billy tossed me a cigar, and Mrs. Billy shook her parasol at me, and they were gone, and had left me to the oblivion I candidly knew I wanted. I put my head back on the calm old pillar—I was conscious of wishing I were as old, so that I could perhaps be as indifferent—and shut my eyes. I was horribly tired, and at the same time most unbearably excited with it all. With what? I didn't know. Was this panic? Was I Pan-struck, as one might well be on the ground of colossal shadowy deities? I felt that I was nervous as a green girl, and threw all sorts of obloquy at my senile state for admitting such a thing. And I kept my eyes shut to rest them from the vision of things seen, and so they stayed until I heard a voice. It was a woman's voice, a voice, I could have sworn was Julia's, and it spoke my name. Now I am not going to tell what my name is, because it is Greek, and old, and funny when I sign it to a reply to a dinner invitation, though it does very well for a scholar who has dry conclusions to make upon living facts. My father was a scholar, and he gave it to me, and perhaps, for that reason, perhaps for some unknown other, I have always been content with it. I have had, indeed, connected with it, a certain inevitable feeling I can't describe, as if nothing else could ever possibly have been my name. But when I opened my eyes I saw it could not have been I who was called. The tourists indeed were upon me, a man and a woman, both young, and they walked together outside the temple, and talked together with a trouble and haste I could hardly forbear to share, even by an eye-beam, it was in itself so passionate. It seemed to draw lesser intelligences to it,

as the sun compels the earth. I thought I knew who they were, this from their costume. They were in white, the flowing robes of an ancient time, and I guessed at once that they were out of a troupe of actors of classical Greek plays, who had been going about London and Paris, during my stay there, in the free beauty of their borrowed dress. But I began to hear them speak, and took no shame in listening. I seemed, indeed, to be there to listen, to share, to partake with them of the tragic imminence of their fate. They spoke rapidly, but in the melody of a majestic tongue which was not mine. Yet, though I could not that night transcribe a word of it, I followed it with the ease of a leaf on a flowing river. She was entreating him, this man of my name, to undo some irrevocable deed. What it was I could not at first determine. Then, from her heart-broken reproaches, and his hurlings back of the "No!" that seemed inevitable, I gradually gathered knowledge. He had sold the state's secret—some secret—he had been paid by the enemy—some enemy—and what he had been paid was to enrich him to the point of seizing her from the arms of the hated lover she was decreed to, and fleeing with her in the enemy's ship. And the ship was out there across the blue line. But the girl would not go. She was adjuring him, in the name of all the gods, to deliver himself up to justice, to inevitable death. Here was where she had appointed their meeting, here by the sacred temple, here where their whisperings might be heard, the better that they should, that priests and gods combined might slay them both and so hasten his expiation. As they walked back and forth in the sunlight, and once she set her foot unconsciously on a snake and I saw he did not move even by a tremor of his shining length, my eyes dwelt with a love and pity I cannot measure upon the filleted gold of her small head. I seemed to partake with her of anguish lest he fail, yet to know it was a foregone fate, and my sadness settled into the acquiescence of despair. He desired nothing but to save her, yet he would not save them both, as they do who play for honors, by giving up himself. And as if I were in his skin I saw why. He loved her too fervidly, too passionately, as earth is tempting, forcing, pushing us to love, and as the big law we

only now and then catch a glimpse of, will not have us. And curiously from that far time, from the misty gates of it, my mind leaped with a throb, a vault down the centuries, to the cavalier who made an immortal discovery and wrote it in immortal words:

"I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honor more."

This, in substance, she represented to him in the passion of her noble phrases, unconsidered, born like tears out of a breaking heart. She was his dearest, she said, she thanked the gods, but nevertheless the gods themselves must be still dearer to him, they and the state. What was it compared with the dishonor he had bought that her poor body should be stained by the mastery of a hated spouse? At that he cried aloud, and she hushed him while my mind had time to flash aside to another mandate made for perpetuity concerning them that kill the body and have not power to kill the soul. Her voice continued in its lyric rise and fall. There was no help for either of them, she told him, he in his present disaster and she before her coming slavery, no help save death, and that might happily be now. But all the same, while the bright rapiers of their argument were glancing, I knew he would not yield: that they were to be discovered, that since she must not go with him, he would snatch at her with the force of love run wild, and, trusting in the ship, resolve in his madness to bear her to it across the parching leagues. That she would cry out to the gods to save them and they would be saved—he by the knife at his throat and she to sink into so ill a mind that no man would take her to him with her bright beauty faded. All this I seemed indubitably, and with a high sadness to know, and athwart the web of it, like something sharply remembered, I heard other voices, insistently familiar ones of the common day. Some one was calling, Jack, Billy, and Mrs. Billy, she waving her parasol up and down, in a pump-handle fashion, across the bright vista through which they ran. Did they shock the other visitants to a scene beloved and throw them out of the aura where they were for the moment visible? Had the time been pre-eminently ripe and right that they—these two beautiful young beings—had

returned for a fleeting hour of a day no longer existent, to play their parts again in faithful rigor to a vanished past, or had I, incalculably endowed, seen but the picture of them, woven for all time into the waving tapestry of the air? However it was, they were gone, not of a sudden, not either walking away or vanishing, but in some quite familiar and convincing fashion, as if I had seen beautiful young lovers go thus, as conclusively as if it were through a gate. And at the instant that I felt they were gone, and knew myself to be in some way the richer, the more complete for having seen them, I heard a cry—not from those three chorusing on behind, but a light, hurried call in a voice I knew. Yet never had I heard it so moved, so jubilant, so full of life. And as I turned to it, she came—Julia came, flying. Her face was pink like dawn, and her glad eyes hailed me. She made no hesitant pause or pretence that it was anything but me and what I stood for she had come to find. Both hands out, she rushed to me, and I with my two hands received her. Standing so, palm to palm, she looked up in my face, one glad smile of recognition. So might the girl I had just seen have looked at her lover if she had, instead of dooming him to death, beckoned him to life with her.

"Am I too late?" she was imploring me, yet with the sweetest certainty that she was not. "Oh, don't tell me I'm too late!"

"No, no," I answered her, worship on my lips, in my eyes, I felt, as in my heart. "No. I was here. I saw them. What difference whether it was you or I?"

"What difference!" she echoed out of a deep-breathed, heavenly tranquillity of happiness. "Oh, what difference!" Then she looked at me for a long minute, as if she saw behind my lean old face what jocund youth I should have been the last to understand, but not to believe. I knew and believed it all. "It is the last now," she said. She was growing fragmentary, like one recalled to an existence not yet comprehended, and only able to stay in it for a minute, and now, the minute over, fading out of it as the two others had faded to my eyes. But I understood. The last parting, she had meant to say. "Next time"—she stammered sweetly, in her lovely hesitancy, like a child of heaven learning the new language and as yet imperfect in it. And then I saw her—the one who had

looked at me, who had spoken, who had known the hour was nearly accomplished, and next time, in whatever age and whatever star, would see the bridegroom claim his bride—I saw her fading out into Julia Dove, the young mate of Jack, who was anxiously hailing her as he ran: for she, in that wonder of predestined flight, had outstripped them all. And I did not care. I did not care that she was to return with him to moonlight and bells at Cava, for that, too, must be mysteriously accomplished. He was beside her now, and I dropped her hands. She looked down at them, as I did it, surprised a little, it seemed, to know why I had been holding them.

"What is it?" Jack was insisting, out of a rage of anxious love. "What in thunder is it, dear?"

Mrs. Billy came up panting and creaking, and her parasol might have dinted the sacred stones, so did she punctuate her haste.

"What is what, dear?" Julia echoed, lightly and most honestly. "Did I hurry? I was bidding Mr. Olmstead good-by."

"Come along, then," said Jack, mopping his smooth young brow, and almost a little fractious at having been fretted into more perplexities. "That train will be in in about three minutes and a half. Come along, Olmstead."

"No," said I. "I'm not going."

I felt light-headed, drunk with the delirium and the certainty of it.

"Not going? You won't get anywhere to-night."

"I don't want to," said I. "I'm somewhere now. There'll be some kind of a little hostelry."

"Don't be a fool, man," said Billy, and

Mrs. Billy shrieked "Malaria!" italicising with her parasol.

"Well, there's a minute gone, and we can't stop here," said Jack, and I didn't blame him. One doesn't lightly subject wives to even a mythical malaria. "Come on, Olmstead. We're off."

Julia turned willingly and obediently with him; but at ten paces she stopped. She ran back toward me. The other look fleeted into her face. "Don't you smell them," she cried. "Roses!"

"Yes," I said, afire with my exultation, and again my mind challenged my own century and found the right word from another man's pen: "Roses from Pæstum roseries!"

"Next time"—she faltered, as if she herself least of all understood what she might be saying. The look had faded.

"Julia! Julia!" Jack was calling, and Mrs. Billy piped me out one more warning: "Malaria, Mr. Olmstead! Remember!"

But I stood there happier, younger, more at peace than anything, I believed, on earth. I could think of but one word to call: the word any man would be likest to leave in the keeping of his dearest, if they were to be parted for a lifetime or two. Mrs. Billy thought it was her word; but it was Julia's, to her soul alone, though it meant no more to her, with the memory washed out of her face, than if a butterfly had settled for an instant on her gown, and she, flying with Jack, had had no eyes for it. I called it after them, and Mrs. Billy, thinking it the echo of her own, shook her parasol despairingly. Out of my kingdom of youth regained and love inalienably assured I called, and it rang splendidly:

"Remember!"

VOICELESS SORROW

By William H. Hayne

HE is unwise who dares intrude
On Sorrow in her voiceless mood,—
The mood of yearning—potent, deep,—
Untenanted by tears or sleep.

No well-framed maxims can bestow
Solace on this unuttered woe,—
Dumb memory beyond the reach
Of mortal hand, or mortal speech.